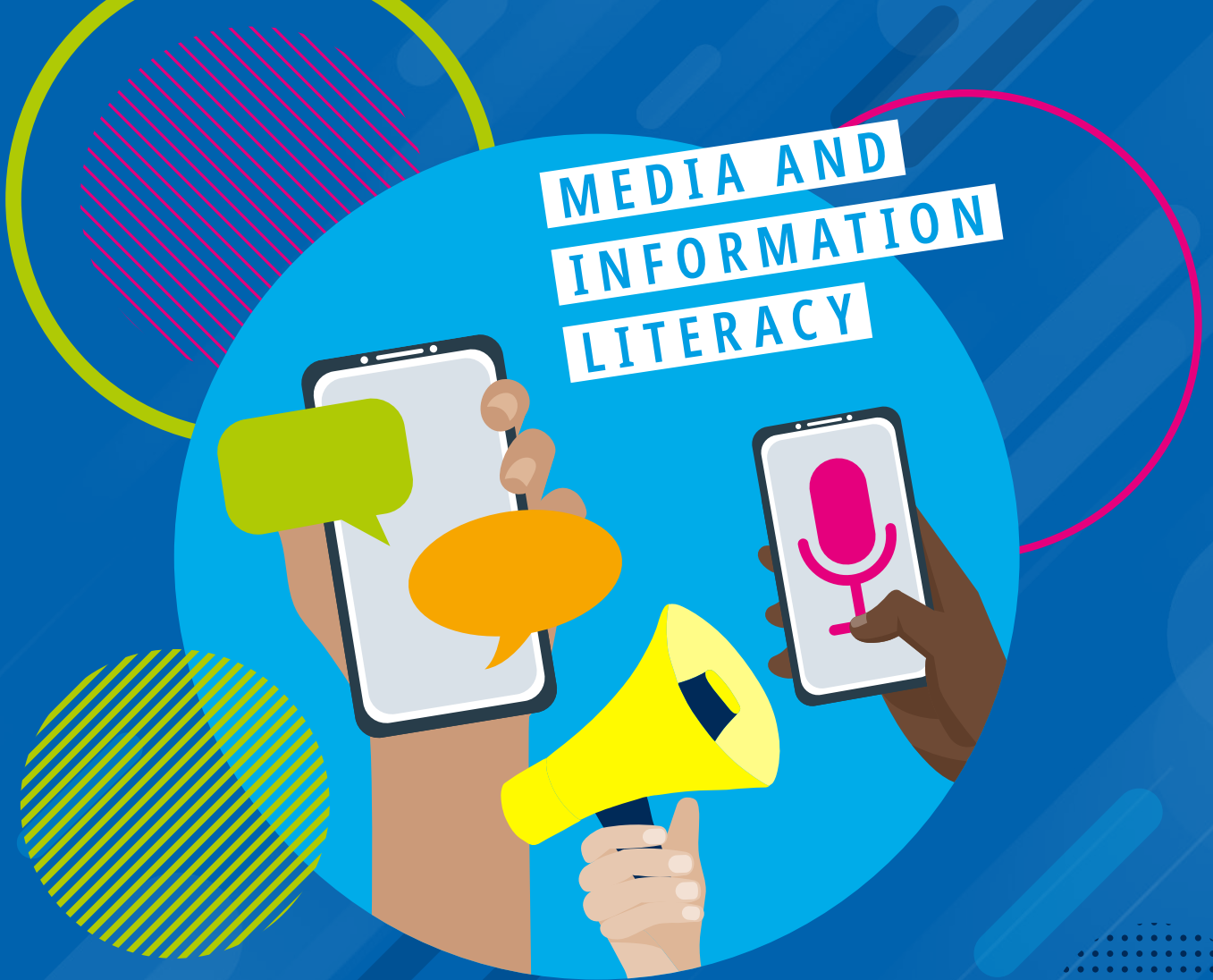


# MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY



*Made for minds.*

KNOW YOUR DIGITAL RIGHTS

## The next generation of Media and Information Literacy

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Strengthening people's ability to navigate cyberspace, to understand and verify information, to produce their own content and act on abuses: this is what Media and Information Literacy is about. It is a powerful and creative process that addresses current societal issues and empowers citizens to critically analyze media and information. But is this enough to tackle one of the most pressing issues in society: the violation of our digital rights? In this paper we make the case that more needs to be done in order to fully integrate digital rights aspects into Media and Information Literacy (MIL) projects worldwide. In addition to focusing on the necessary skills to address digital rights issues, MIL projects should emphasize that digital rights are our fundamental human rights that also come with responsibilities.

## The future of Media and Information Literacy

Media and Information Literacy (MIL) comes with a great promise: It is about citizens learning how to navigate cyberspace, access news, analyze what information is true or false, and reflect on what they do online and how they can be a role model for others. MIL is about ensuring that citizens possess the skills to access, understand and use the internet and a variety of media. It is about creatively engaging with current media and societal issues, and actively participating in creating and protecting a public sphere which is respectful, pluralistic and engaged.

But is this enough for today's media world? A world in which cyberbullying leaves young people traumatized. A world in which users might go to jail for distributing false information. A world in which citizens might not be able to access the internet because governments are afraid of political dissent. A world in which a few companies have so much power that they influence how our information ecosystem works. A world in which governments are surveilling their citizens in the name of security.

To address these challenges, MIL must be about much more. MIL should not only be understood as a series of textbook-chapters, school workshops or a set of skills to be gained. MIL needs to be about active participation and be embraced as a process leading to empowerment. It must shine a light on the unfairness and structural inequalities in our media systems. It should cover suppression, human suffering, crime and injustice. It is essential that MIL also focuses on the dark side of technology and open citizens' eyes to how people misuse technologies and how they unashamedly commit rights violations without fear of consequences.

MIL should offer guidance on what we can do about this. And this means it has to be interlinked with something very fundamental: the question of digital rights.

MIL is important to safeguard the rights of citizens, young people, those who navigate our media and information ecosystem and internet users. It is also necessary for MIL projects to address the responsibilities of those who define the rules and policies governing how we communicate, and those who provide us with the infrastructure to do so — the technical tools and platforms we use on a daily basis. MIL is important to ensure that young people can take their future into their own hands and raise their voice against injustices, even when the challenges they face seem overwhelming.



### DIGITAL RIGHTS CHALLENGES

## Digital security

Privacy and safe communication in the digital sphere is an issue of growing concern. In many countries there are no robust laws or policies that protect citizens' privacy and personal data. To the contrary, increased surveillance often means more privacy violations for citizens. In addition, the business models of many private companies such as social media platforms are based on people's user data. These firms therefore try to collect as much data as possible by default. As a result, citizens, in particular young people, are facing issues such as privacy theft, sextortion or blackmailing. Communicating digitally means thinking about the risks your messages might carry for the person, group or networks receiving them. MIL projects should enable citizens to know the right tools, platforms and settings to communicate safely and respect others' privacy, for example through encryption. MIL projects should also guide citizens on how to demand stronger government enforcement of data protection and privacy regulations.

## Digital rights topics relevant for DW Akademie and media development:

### Access

- Global digital divide
- Access to devices
- Internet access
- Gender equality
- Net neutrality

### Safety

- Encryption
- Data protection
- Surveillance
- Cyber crime



### Governance

- Governing internet platforms
- Governing the internet
- Cyber security laws
- Open data

### Internet platforms

- Misinformation
- Censorship
- Algorithms
- Hate speech

Overview of digital rights topics

Our digital sphere is becoming more controversial, more complex and more political — making MIL even more relevant. Issues related to digital rights have a tremendous influence on all competencies citizens need to navigate our media landscape. Topics such as enhancing your digital security, protecting your digital identity or dealing with issues such as cyberbullying and hate speech are already part of many MIL projects. Many of these projects focus on developing the skills that help us deal with these issues. This is a very important step, but it is also essential to change the approach. For MIL projects to become even more effective, those who develop and run MIL projects and trainings worldwide need to think about the digital rights aspects of MIL more carefully. Digital rights issues need to be framed as what they are: our fundamental human rights.

## Digital rights are human rights

So, is there an international agreement or treaty on digital rights that MIL practitioners can refer to? In 2012 (and again in 2014 and 2016), the UN Human Rights Council agreed in a statement that the “same rights that people have offline must also be protected online.” This means that rather than the United Nations seeking to define new rights for the online space, they have recommended extending existing human rights to cyberspace.

Our human rights were adopted in the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. More than 70 years later, they are still the most fundamental laws we have. However, much has changed since then. Technologies — such as the smartphone and Artificial Intelligence — impose new challenges and threats, especially to the right to privacy. New actors have appeared. Social media companies are now one of the main distributors of news and information. Users are increasingly dependent on the business model, data collection and algorithms of proprietary platforms, rather than being able to navigate the open internet freely and independently. In addition, communicating online means communicating across several borders and sometimes across several jurisdictions. For example, if a user from Bangladesh publishes something on Facebook, a US company, the data might travel through servers that are located in several different countries. Which jurisdiction applies in this case? All these issues pose significant challenges for how we live, communicate and govern in a digital world. It is essential that we make sure our human rights are also applied in the digital sphere.



## DIGITAL RIGHTS CHALLENGES

### Internet shutdowns

In 2019, at least 213 internet shutdowns happened worldwide. Shutdowns can come in various forms—from platform-specific blockages and mobile data shutdowns to total internet blackouts that sometimes last for weeks or months. Internet shutdowns are often enforced at politically sensitive times, such as public protests or elections. All internet shutdowns disrupt people's ability to communicate and share information. Internet shutdowns violate human rights and affect citizens' livelihoods.

Citizens should understand how internet shutdowns can harm individuals, society and the economy. MIL should empower citizens to use circumvention tools that help them to access the internet throughout blockages. Citizens should also be able to formulate claims for the shutdown to end by supporting campaigns or sharing their story on how an internet shutdown affects their livelihood.

## Responsibilities of governments and private companies

With human rights come responsibilities for citizens, governments and other actors. From a human rights perspective, individuals are rights-holders who can make legitimate claims. Governments are duty-bearers that are responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights and can be held accountable for their actions. This holds true for the offline world as well as the digital sphere. Certainly, digital rights are not just about individuals and governments. It is essential to also consider the role of private companies and other third parties that have gained tremendous power in recent years.

Take Myanmar as an example, a country that Facebook dominates so much that many users think it is the Internet. Thousands of posts

and comments on the platform incited hate against the Muslim Rohingya minority. This led to physical violence including mass rape, killings and ethnic cleansing that forced more than 700,000 people to flee the country, according to UNHCR. Although Facebook's community guidelines take a clear stance against "violent speech" on their platform, the company itself ignored many warnings from human rights activists to take action in Myanmar. In a case like this, companies such as Facebook need to be reminded and forced to respect human rights. The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights recognize "the role of business enterprises as specialized organs of society performing specialized functions, required to comply with all applicable laws and to respect human rights." This also means that it is governments that have the duty to protect against human rights abuses by companies and other third parties through policies, legislation and regulation.



### DIGITAL RIGHTS CHALLENGES

#### Harmful speech

Online harassment and hate speech can be hugely damaging for those targeted. It can also lead people to withdraw from social media platforms completely, although these platforms may be the only place where citizens can access independent and uncensored news and information in their country.

Many young people do not know that digital platforms, as well as governments, have a responsibility to keep users safe and protect them from harmful speech online. The community standards of social networks, as well as national laws, offer guidance on how to act on those violations.

However, the mechanisms to counter or report harmful speech online are often not well known or not user-friendly, and reactions of companies are often slow or do not happen at all. Sometimes, social platforms do not even provide services in the language of the countries where the platforms are used, which further limits the user's digital rights to appeal against hate speech and abuse online. In order to fight harmful speech online, MIL should empower citizens not only to identify hate speech or harassment but to know the appeal mechanisms and demand change from governments and companies alike.

## DW Akademie's Media and Information Literacy Model



### Access information and media

- Find accurate information
- Find original sources and statistics

### Analyze information

- Question the content they have consumed
- Check original sources and information

### Reflect on their media behavior

- Understand personal rights
- Understand obligations as a media consumer

### Create content

- Write a post for social media
- Create articles, audio and video

### Act on conclusions

- Participate in societal debates
- Protect personal data online

## Examples of DW Akademie MIL projects

In **Guatemala**, DW Akademie's project aims to integrate MIL in the curricula of an alternative education system directed towards young people in disadvantaged areas. Partner organization ASEC broadcasts educational radio programs through the radio network IGER, reaching over 20,000 Guatemalan youth in rural areas throughout the country, and is including MIL in the schoolbooks of this educational offer. Meanwhile partner Comunicares focuses on indigenous communities and the transmission of media competencies according to youth's media usage habits and their cultural codes. Learning through play is one of the main assets of this MIL project. Best practices are being transferred to neighboring countries such as El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico.

In the **Palestinian Territories**, DW Akademie's partner, the NGO 7amleh, is promoting Palestinians' awareness of their digital rights and capacity to advocate for them. Following research conducted by this organization, it became clear that young women in particular are under threat of privacy violations and blackmail attempts. However, awareness of these threats among Palestinians, especially young girls, is low. 7amleh responded to this need by organizing digital security workshops with a focus on gender-based violence online, publishing manuals and launching campaigns.

In **Namibia**, through the Media and Information Literacy Learning Initiative (MiLLi\*), young people learn how to navigate media responsibly and critically. In summer schools, MiLLi\* trains young people from all of Namibia's regions to become facilitators in MIL. The MiLLi\* facilitators then reach out to young people in their rural communities and independently run MIL youth projects, with the help of training guides. In this way, a growing and nationwide peer-to-peer network of media literate young people emerges. They have the competencies to create their own content and critically reflect on their own social media usage and media consumption.

In **Moldova**, DW Akademie, together with its partners, focuses on working with young children. In playful and interactive school workshops and media camps, children learn how to critically assess media content and produce their own reports. Next to working with school pupils, DW supports the production of a youth TV program that broadcasts nationwide via the public broadcasters. The youth TV program addresses topics of interest to young people that are mostly missing from the nation's TV programming.

### Practical tips on integrating digital rights issues into your MIL projects:

- Build a network of digital rights experts and consultants on the ground and develop your strategy with their help.
- Regularly consult with digital rights, human rights and legal experts on latest issues and developments on digital rights and weave the information into your project.
- Systematically analyze background information, use cases and stories and develop MIL approaches and product from them.
- When developing digital rights projects listen to the needs and habits of your target group and co-create your projects together with them.
- Try to break down complex legal and digital rights issues into content that speaks the same language as your target group.
- Make it fun and entertaining: Consider innovative and playful formats—e.g. online and offline games have proven to work well.
- Make it practical—let them produce their own media content on digital rights. This will empower them to fully understand the digital rights issues they are covering and improve their creation skills.
- Make use of a peer to peer approach in your MIL workshop. Young people should interact with other young people and share their knowledge.
- Empower your target groups to be multipliers and trainers for MIL and digital rights themselves—these structures enable you to fully embrace the peer-to-peer approach in your project.
- Support them to campaign for their rights—depending on the country and the risks of your target group, you can work with them on campaigns in order to claim their digital rights.

DW Akademie also provides many information on how to implement your MIL project ideas in this Practical guidebook for trainers: [dw.com/downloads/38871690/dwaeditionmilweb.pdf](https://www.dw.com/downloads/38871690/dwaeditionmilweb.pdf)

MIL should not stop at the individual level. It should sensitize users to critically question the behavior of other actors, such as governments or private companies. MIL should encourage them to demand accountability. MIL should also continue to motivate citizens to change their own behavior, for example by protecting their personal data or enhancing their digital security measures. Citizens should also know much more about how to appeal against abuses and how to stand up for their rights, for example by supporting a powerful campaign.

Project managers and trainers—everyone who designs and implements digital rights projects worldwide—need to think about how to include digital rights aspects into MIL. DW Akademie's project experience from the past few years has shown that a number of things must be considered in order to approach MIL in a way that emphasizes digital rights (See box on the left).

In order to develop and test this concept the next step will be to consult MIL and digital rights experts, practitioners and project managers in order to learn from their practical experience and get advice on how to advance these ideas further.

Standing up for your rights and demanding accountability and change is not an easy task. In authoritarian regimes it is highly risky for individuals in civil society to raise digital rights issues or use circumvention tools. Not just for the individuals, but also for trainers and project managers. But facing this challenge is also important and necessary and worth fighting for.





## Seven steps to integrate digital rights components into MIL projects:

### 1. Knowing your human rights; understanding the concept of digital rights

The first step is to convey knowledge on the concept of human rights: Citizens should know about the rights and responsibilities of individuals, governments and private businesses. Citizens should also know about the challenges of applying human rights in the digital sphere, what our digital rights are and why they are needed.

### 2. Carefully identify the digital rights challenges

The second step of integrating Digital Rights into MIL is to carefully investigate a challenge that users are facing and look out for ways it is connected to digital rights. The spread of misinformation is not just an issue that originates from users' lack of verification skills, but is also a result of structural issues, such as content moderation policies or social media platforms' algorithms, which are more likely to distribute news with controversial headlines or content from politicians who deliberately spread false information in order to manipulate citizens.

### 3. Identify the actors involved and their role within the identified digital rights challenge

Once an issue is identified, it is important to carefully review the actors involved. As mentioned above, social media platforms play a big role in distributing false information. Also, other actors might be important, such as content producers who benefit financially from the production of misinformation. Politicians or the government might also be involved. Of course, internet users do also have a role in this issue—they are the ones that are likely to be most affected by the spread of misinformation, but are also the ones contributing to it by distributing the false news even further.

### 4. Identify their duties, responsibilities and obligations

Once you know the actors involved, you should think about their rights and responsibilities. Users have the right to be protected from misinformation and they have the duty to communicate responsibly, by not sharing misinformation on purpose. Platforms and other third parties have a responsibility to protect users from the spread of misinformation, e.g. by using content moderation, flagging systems or other measures. However, they cannot be held accountable for that. Governments are responsible for regulating private businesses and other third parties, and have a duty to protect users from misinformation. Governments can be held accountable for their duty to protect users.

### 5. Analyze existing solutions

In a lot of cases, there are existing solutions to many digital rights issues. For example, governments might have issued laws or regulations against misinformation and private companies have added appeal mechanisms or flagging systems that make it easier for users to spot misinformation. They have also enhanced their algorithms to identify misinformation more easily and made more content moderation efforts. However, sometimes fighting against one issue throws up new problems. In the case of misinformation, overregulation and excessive moderation might lead to censorship.

### 6. Examine the risk potential for every country, region or peer group

Claiming your rights against powerful actors comes with risks for the success of the project, but also individual risks for project managers and peer groups—in authoritative countries in particular. It is therefore essential to carefully examine the specific risks in every country and region individually. In order to analyze your threats, it is important to know your adversaries and to estimate their ability and the likelihood that they would act against you. Doing no harm should be the top priority. If you think your risks are too great, you should bring your peer group's attention to the risks and try to find strategies on how they can keep on monitoring the situation.

### 7. Formulate legitimate claims and check existing initiatives

If there is no satisfying solution to the problem, you should try and formulate a legitimate claim against certain actors. You should also carefully analyze the options you have to make your claims heard. Sometimes it is useful to look out for other supporters such as human rights activists or digital rights experts. There are also many opportunities to raise your voice online: for example, there are powerful campaigns or online petitions from activists and human rights defenders on social media that users can contribute to. DW Akademie has published a guide on how to run successful awareness campaigns which provides plenty of useful examples. Also look out for human activists and digital rights organizations in the country or region.



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## DW Akademie


DW Akademie is Deutsche Welle's center for international media development. As a strategic partner of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), DW Akademie carries out media development projects that strengthen the human right to freedom of opinion and promote free access to information.

DW Akademie also works on projects funded by the German Foreign Office and the European Union—in approximately 50 developing and emerging countries.

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